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Oration of

General

H. U. Boynton

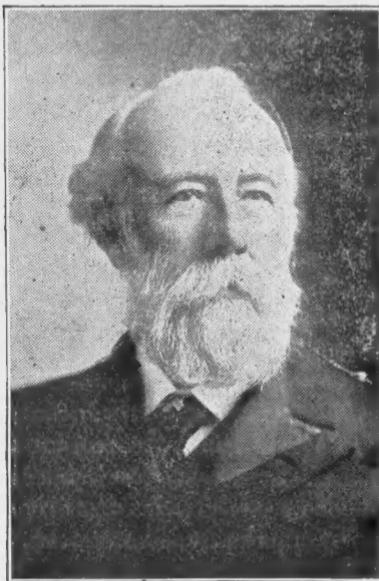
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GENERAL HENRY V. BOYNTON.

General Boynton's Address.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I come before you, a son of Massachusetts, having an ancestor among the Minute Men called out by the battle of Lexington, and another, a private soldier at Bunker Hill. I do not mention these things by way of self laudation — far, very far from that — but solely to give greater point and stronger emphasis to what it will be my pleasure to say in regard to the still earlier part played by North Carolina in the great drama of the Revolution.

Every American should esteem it high privilege to take part in public exercises wherever this day commemorating our National Independence is celebrated. It is an exceptional privilege, as well as high honor, to so participate in this Commonwealth of North Carolina, upon whose soil the first battle against unjust taxation was fought in the Colonial Era, where the first Declaration of Independence was issued, and especially upon this memorable battle ground — the high water mark of foreign invasion — from which that tide ebbed swiftly away to British surrender at Yorktown. Behold the mile posts which history has set up along that shining way which led straight on to American Independence — Alamance, Mecklenburg, King's Mountain, Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, Yorktown!

In celebrating the Revolutionary period, we should not forget that the fires of patriotism, of defiance to British authority and of independence burned brightly in North Carolina long before Lexington, or Concord, or Bunker Hill; or that the last Legislature of this State to recognize royal authority was that of March, 1774.

Today we look back to that Independence which this battlefield did so much to secure, and glory in the victory here achieved — for in every sense it was a tactical victory, and the immediate forerunner of the enemy's final defeat. Turning from the past to the present, we find the same flag

for which our fathers jointly fought, now floating, by the joint efforts of all their sons, in perpetual sunlight — for on its folds the sun no longer sets.

To my mind, if there had been nothing more accomplished by the war with Spain than the rallying of all sections again, with one accord, under the one flag, to do battle for the nation, this one momentous result would have been worth the cost of the war, even the fearful cost of our soldiers' lives. But, without intent on the part of man, and so, we must believe, in the Providence of God, something even beyond the final and effective welding of the sections has come to the nation. That flag has been planted on the other side of the earth — planted to stay — and our country finds itself, through the marvelous and well-nigh miraculous work of our Army and Navy, in the very front rank of the world powers. Such is the fruitage from the good seed sown on this and the other famous battlefields of the Revolution.

While our Civil War was raging it looked at times as if no sun could rise again for either section over that midnight of the Republic. But looking back on it calmly, as we can do now, it sometimes seems to me that this was but a course in the school of war through which the nation was taken by an overruling Power to teach Americans on each side, by pitting each against Americans, that nothing in the line of soldierly endeavor could surpass American fighting and thus fit this re-united Republic to hold its own among the nations in this day of wider horizons, of new opportunities, and graver duties. From that school of the Civil War we have been graduated a giant military power. With this added strength we are starting — hand in hand, thank God, hand in hand again — to give to distant lands and peoples the blessings won on the battlefields of the Revolution. In this there is no trace of aggression, or of imperialism — that Boston nightmare of a few prophets of evil — or anything except an honest effort and determination to meet new duties with unflinching courage.

This park stands for more than the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. It represents the culmination of mountain and

over-mountain effort — largely North Carolina effort, and brilliantly successful effort to check the British invasion of the South. This monument represents and recalls not only all that was glorious in martial deeds and the sufferings of the patriot people of the Revolution, but it recalls to everlasting remembrance the infamy of England. It tells to all who behold, and will tell to all who come after us, the shameful story that the invasion of the Carolinas was deliberately planned as one of murder and rapine, and every cruelty which savage war could inflict. It was work of this kind, wholly outside of any rules of warfare, except such as obtain among savages, that was put into the hands of Cornwallis to execute, who, in turn, committed the consummation of the predetermined atrocities and butcheries to the willing hands of Tarleton and Ferguson. Whatever these tools were guilty of—and of what in the list of blackest crimes were they not guilty—Cornwallis was an accessory before the facts, and an applauding and confirming principal after the crimes.

This monument is for North Carolina the brilliant point on the gilded dome of our independence—seen far and wide, a gleaming cut of the past that will never grow dim. Think of the situation which it commemorates! You are all familiar with it; but standing here on holy ground, to refresh our minds with the chief facts is to lay fresh fuel on the altars of patriotism. South Carolina had been overrun; organized resistance had ceased; their patriots were being hunted like wild beasts, and murdered wherever found; North Carolina's regulars had been captured through the imbecility of General Lincoln, defending Charleston; the enemy was resting along the southern boundaries of this State awaiting the ripening of the grain crops to advance and subdue it. North Carolina had only her militia with which to resist invasion. All along her southern horizon the sky was as black as midnight in a tropical storm. Did North Carolina quail? Let King's Mountain answer! Let Cowpens testify! Let this battlefield respond.

In spite of this blackness of darkness the Old North State stood defiant. Without regulars, and with a scattered

militia, citizens, singly and in groups, fired upon and harassed all hostile bands and held the State steady until it could assemble its scant resources and rally such outside aid as could be reached. There is no more honorable chapter in Revolutionary history than that which covers the time from Cornwallis' appearance on the southern border of North Carolina until the fires of patriotism flamed high on King's Mountain, fed with the wreck of Ferguson's camp and army.

There is nothing finer in the romance of war than the gathering of those "over-mountain" North Carolinians from what in part is now Tennessee, to hurl back the too confident invader. They came with the scant outfit of hardy mountaineers, but with those deadly Deckard rifles which they soon made the terror of British regulars. They hailed from regions of which Cornwallis knew nothing, and from settlements beyond the mountains the very names of which he had never heard. They were rallied by messengers which must have recalled to many of those Scotch-Irish men the speeding of the Fiery Cross to rally the clans in the Scottish Highlands. They set out with prayer, invoking "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." At an appointed rendezvous they met the Campbells from Virginia; and South Carolina and Georgia from their condition of sore distress subsequently contributed an honorable quota. The march was through the snows of the mountains, but in good time they were in the vicinity of Ferguson, who had sent threats of hanging their leaders, and devastating their over-mountain region.

The country is familiar with the history of King's Mountain. Its fame is fadeless on the pages of Revolutionary story. There was no more skillfully planned, more courageously fought, or more decisive battlefield in all the war. And the lone and unpretentious monument which North Carolina has erected on that distant mountain top upon her southern border marks one of the most important epochs of the war.

Then came Cowpens with its crushing defeat of Tarleton, that twin comrade of Ferguson in diabolism. In the glory of that day the Maryland line participated with the soldiers

from the States which were represented in the extermination of Ferguson's force. And here also North Carolina valor shone resplendent. Invasion was crippled. Patriotism in all the South had taken heart again. Cornwallis was in a desperate mood. And thus he drew on to his fate at this field upon which it is our privilege to assemble today.

You know the history of this battle well. It would be superfluous for me to rehearse its details. For Lord Cornwallis it was, in a military sense, one of those victories which in every essential element was sore defeat. While he occupied the field, he had neither destroyed, nor disorganized, nor discouraged the patriot army. For him the limits of successful career had been reached. From Guilford Courthouse he fled to his doom. You all know the result — retreat, stout struggle against fatal conditions, but final surrender. The star of his fortunes passed its zenith at King's Mountain; it was stooping toward the west at Cowpens; it was in the mists of the horizon when the battle ended here, and a little later, and as the direct result of this battle, it plunged to darkest setting.

Tarleton, in his carefully written history, describes Guilford as a stubbornly contested field where "victory alternately presided over each army," and, further, as "a victory which, however splendid and honorable to the general and the troops, was not useful or advantageous to Great Britain."

Fox, in the British Parliament, declared that the victory was with the Americans, for, he argued, that in the face of recognized defeat Cornwallis could have done no more than he did do, namely, leave the field and flee to the coast, as he was forced to do.

There is one false tradition of this field which the citizens of North Carolina properly combat and deny, and that is the charge that the militia of their State, having been placed in the front line, ran without engaging the enemy. It is a story written twenty-eight years after the battle, from memory alone, by a writer since shown to have promulgated many erroneous statements.

To your fellow citizen, Hon. David Schenck, the State of North Carolina, and all students of Revolutionary history as well, owe a heavy debt of gratitude for the masterly demonstration of the falsity of this long current fiction. Equally are the State and the country indebted to him for every part of that brilliant and exhaustive history in which he sets forth the splendid part which unconquered and unconquerable North Carolina played throughout the Revolutionary War.

As to Guilford, the evidence which he presents from eye-witnesses, and contemporary reports, is conclusive that the North Carolina militia were placed in the front line, and ordered by General Greene in person to deliver two rounds and then retire behind the second line. This they did, firing their first volley with terrible effect at 150 yards, and the second at forty yards, coolly resting their rifles on a fence and taking deadly aim. The testimony of British officers establishes this, even without the equally conclusive and impartial testimony from patriot sources. The hasty retreat behind the second line, after the full execution of their orders, affords no justification for the erroneous and cruel contributions to alleged history to which it gave rise. The posting of this line of riflemen without bayonets, the orders given it, the quick retreat behind the line of regulars in the face of a bayonet charge of the enemy need no defence when examined from a military point of view alone.

Time will not permit more than this general reference to the chief historical injustice done those who opened this battle of Guilford Courthouse with such deadly effect. Every North Carolinian, and every student of history, who has not already done so, should procure and carefully read the exhaustive and reliable work of Hon. David Schenck, in which the proofs of heroic conduct appear clear as noonday.

Nothing is more exasperating to the student of our military history than the persistence with which erroneous statements, born of the confusion and uncertainty of the field of battle, are reproduced by careless writers and given continuing life. As this feature of what passes for history has a di-

rect bearing upon the injustice done North Carolina soldiers so long ago, and still repeated in such histories as those of Washington Irving and General Carrington, and in leading encyclopedias, a few modern instances may not prove without interest or pertinence here.

In describing the battle of Missionary Ridge, General Grant and General Sherman in their Memoirs; General Badeau in his "Military History of Grant" (which, it is claimed by Badeau, was revised by Grant) and a host of writers of lesser note, insist that General Sherman carried the north end of Missionary Ridge to the Tunnel. Not only is this not true for the date given in all these histories, but it is not true for any other date, since Sherman throughout the battle did not succeed in carrying any part of Missionary Ridge. And yet, at the time these histories were written, there were hundreds of officers and thousands of soldiers living who were eye witnesses of Sherman's attacks and failures. And a small army of them is living yet.

Take another case. Gen. James Grant Wilson—not the Cavalry Wilson—is a military oracle of Philadelphia and New York publishers. He has edited volume after volume of military history touching the Civil War. Not a single one has yet appeared without grave errors which the most casual examination of the published official records would have enabled him to avoid. Of a certain movement in the battle of Chattanooga, in a volume wholly his own, he writes:

"At 1 p. m. Sherman gave the order to advance on Missionary Ridge. With a hundred guns playing upon them, and with as many answering from the Federal Heights, his command gained the foot of the first advanced spur of Missionary Ridge, climbed it through storms of shot and shell, beat back the bayonets that wreathed its top, clambered over the hot muzzles of the guns upon its summit, and at half past three planted their banners there, a step nearer the superior heights frowning above."

Now what do you suppose the facts to be, which the official record clearly discloses, and to which there are a cloud

of living witnesses? Simply these, that the spur indicated was not occupied by the enemy, and not a shot was fired from it, or at it, by rifle or cannon, during the movement which Wilson thus describes in the hackneyed phrases of blood and thunder war literature. Not only was there no such occurrence in front of this part of the line, but there was nothing like it for him on any part of the line. Sherman, unopposed and unobstructed, marched up to some unoccupied hills, detached from Missionary Ridge, and established his lines there. All the rest is the stage thunder and sheet-iron lightning of the military novelist. His battle was the next day.

Prof. Coppee, a West Point man, and a Professor at Lehigh University, in his life of General Thomas presents the second day's battle at Chickamauga as the first; and further declares that during a certain night the whole of the Army of the Cumberland was busy entrenching its lines for the coming battle, when, as a matter of fact, the entire army was marching that night from sunset to sunrise, and not a shovelful of earth was thrown by it throughout the battle.

Even the highly praised histories of Prof. J. F. Rhodes, Gen. James Schouler and John Fiske—all professional historians of accepted standing—present instances of error as glaring as these.

The application of these facts to the perversion of Guilford's history is plain. If celebrated historians in this day, surrounded with credible witnesses, and with every means of testing their work at command, commit such egregious errors where error is utterly inexcusable, it will not seem strange that this unjust charge against North Carolina troops, once launched into the current of alleged history, should have lived so long without refutation.

North Carolina students of her military history in all wars should be more persistent in setting forth the proof of the gross error in regard to the action of her soldiers on this field, because of the admitted record of their splendid fighting elsewhere. Let me cite you a few figures of the Civil War:

The famous 26th North Carolina, of Pettigrew's Brigade

of Heth's Division holds the record of the severest regimental loss during the war. It went into the Battle of Gettysburg over 800 strong. It lost 588 killed and wounded. On the third day it mustered only 216 for duty, and the next but 80. Besides the killed and wounded there were 120 missing, many of whom were among the fallen. The percentage of killed and wounded was 72 and of casualties 86. This was ten times the percentage of the total loss of the American army at Santiago, which was little over 8 per cent., including El Caney, Aguadores and San Juan Hill. On the same day at Gettysburg, in the same brigade, Company C., 11th North Carolina, lost two officers killed, and 34 men wounded out of 38. In the third day's fight Captain Bird, of this company, with the four men left, went into the Long-street charge, the color bearer was shot, and the Captain brought out the flag.

The Second North Carolina Battalion lost 63.7 percent. at Gettysburg; the 27th at Antietam 61.2 per cent.: the 18th, in the Seven Day's battle, 56.5 per cent., and the 7th 56.2 per cent. The casualties of the 4th, at Seven Pines, reached 54.4 per cent; the 3d, at Gettysburg, 50 per cent., without counting 51 missing, most of whom were killed or wounded. For Ramseur's North Carolina Brigade, at Chancellorsville, the loss was 52.2 per cent. In all these cases the North Carolina organizations named lost more than every second man.

Taking the war through, the records show that North Carolina lost in killed over 17 per cent. of her entire population of military age.

Let us reason backward from the splendid fighting standards which these figures establish. Could such a military population spring from sires who failed in duty on battlefields of the Revolution?

The Revolutionary epochs in which the citizens of the North State were first have already been named—first to resist unjust taxation by arms; first to announce formal independence of Great Britain: first, when the war was on, to turn back British invasion of the South.

Here, on this ground, citizens of North Carolina, organ-

ized by act of its legislature, again have been first—the first to purchase and preserve a battlefield of the Revolution. Speaking generally, the country has done little toward saving the features of its colonial battle grounds from oblivion. Various steps have been taken in different parts of the land to mark historic points of that seven years' struggle; but nowhere save here, so far as I am informed, has a Revolutionary battlefield been bought outright and preserved entire. Bunker Hill has its monument—surrounded by solid blocks of brick and mortar. There is a bronze Minute Man at Concord, and granite tablets on the line of March from Cambridge to Lexington. The State of Pennsylvania has saved the camp ground of Valley Forge. The Daughters of the American Revolution in Connecticut are erecting a historical tablet where Putnam took his famous ride, and their sisters in Fredericksburg, Va., have resolved to mark all Revolutionary points in that vicinity. The Government has erected an imposing monument at Yorktown. New Jersey has placed a monument on each of her fields of note, and some work of this kind has been done in New York. These things are well, and deserve the support and acclaim of all patriots.

But how these pale before the more comprehensive project here! Here also is a monument to mark the field of Guilford Courthouse. But how much more than that is here? The very roads that existed when the battle was on; the open ground across which the opposing lines faced each other; the position of the fence from which the North Carolina militia delivered those deadly volleys; the lines of the regulars in rear of them; the forest of desperate fighting where victory hung long in the balance; the ravines and ridges which saw the close of a battle which gave Cornwallis the field, but at such fearful cost as to prove his complete undoing—all here, the framework and the detailed setting of one of the decisive engagements of the war, all possessed and restored. While the Government has reared that noble shaft at Yorktown, it is but half completed work. It will not be finished until on this ground, marking the field which made Yorktown possible, it has raised an equally imposing

monument to tell the preliminary and compelling story of Guilford Courthouse to the ages.

And while waiting for the Government, and rallying all the influences which we can command to secure action at its hands, I cannot forbear to appeal here and now for more immediate aid to a force and power before which modern civilization justly bows in homage—woman. The land is full of patriotic societies of women. Of these, Colonial Dames, Founders and Patriots, Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of the Revolution, are giving increased attention to the preservation of early battle history. If the women of this good State would enthusiastically unite to assist in the full marking of this field, the time would be short before in every particular the work accomplished here would rival in interest and completeness everything yet done to preserve the other fields of that war. This is a work worthy of the ambition and State pride of those women who stand highest in every walk of life. There is no nobler history to hand down unimpaired to coming generations than the record of North Carolina in the days when it bade defiance to British diabolism, incarnate in the persons of that trinity of evil, Cornwallis, Tarleton and Ferguson. If in the near future the country should hear that the women of this State had organized to help in the further restoration and preservation of this field, it would feel certain that ere long it would be the most interesting point of pilgrimage among the Revolutionary fields of the land.

Such an occasion as this—such an imposing and influential gathering, assembled to do honor both to our nationality, and to the men who fought on this field to lay its foundations broad and deep, should so rekindle reverence for Revolutionary effort and sacrifice as to set on foot general and earnest work for the preservation of all decisive battle fields of the struggle which gave us independence. Especially should this event arouse North Carolina to renewed interest in her fields of ancient but enduring renown.

The government is giving wide and absolutely impartial

attention to the restoration and preservation of the most noted battle fields of the Civil War. This involves the purchase of lands; the identification and marking of lines of battle; the erection of monuments by the States to regiments and batteries; the placing of guns on iron carriages in every fighting position of the batteries; and historical tablets for every army corps, division, brigade and battery engaged. This work has been finished at Antietam. It is well advanced at Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Chattanooga and Shiloh. It is in progress at Vicksburg. Bills have been favorably reported in Congress to establish a Military Park at Atlanta; and a bill for another including Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness and Spottsylvania has just passed the Senate and awaits the action of the House at the coming session.

The Government has already appropriated a million dollars for the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Park. Seven battlefields are included within its limits, or reached by its improved roads. In that portion alone which embraces the fighting ground at Chickamauga the Government owns ten square miles, and the combined acreage and mileage, including the Georgia and Tennessee divisions, of this park exceeds the aggregate area and mileage of all the other military parks yet established. Every State which had troops in those battles sent a commission to assist the National Commission in ascertaining the lines where they fought and deciding upon locations for monuments. More than four hundred brigade lines of battle have been thus identified with the cordial concurrence of all the State commissions, and the veterans of each side who have visited the field in great numbers. The historical tablets for seven of the brigades set forth the designation, and the names of the commanding officers of the seven North Carolina regiments, together with the commanding officers of the brigades, divisions and corps in which they served. Thus there is on this field, preserved on imperishable tablets, a record of the organization and the movements in the battle of the 29th

North Carolina Infantry, Col. Wm. R. Creasman commanding; the 39th, Col. David Coleman; the 58th, Col. John B. Palmer; the 60th, Lieut.-Col. James M. Ray and Capt. Jas. T. Weaver, and the 6th Cavalry, Col. Geo. N. Folk.

In the same way on the Chattanooga field the records of the 58th and the 60th, with their commanding officers, are again recorded on tablets there. North Carolina had, and I suppose still has, a State Chickamauga Commission. Why should she not have one for Guilford Courthouse, and for the identification of her other Revolutionary fields, and the preservation of their history?

Those patriotic citizens who originated and have carried forward this park project deserve well not only of their State, but of the Nation. They have blazed the way along lines of action which every State should follow whose soil was glorified by a Revolutionary battlefield. When the country comes to know, as it should be made to know, what they have done here, it will be both a revelation and an incentive to similar efforts elsewhere. The fame of their work must yet fill the land, and the honors which are their due be abundantly bestowed.

In looking back over the hundred and twenty years that have elapsed since British invasion was checked on this field, it is natural to ask ourselves how the two nations then engaged have maintained their respective roles, and how time has dealt with the two forces which struggled here for mastery. The savage policy devised for Cornwallis, and by him committed to Tarleton and Ferguson has been the policy of England ever since. She has stalked among the weak nations of the earth crushing them by conquest and chaining them to her imperial chariot for gain.

And what of this Republic which this battlefield of Guilford Courthouse helped in such marked degree to usher in? Has it not moved on from grace to grace, and from glory to glory? It has had its trials on land and sea. It has not left its own shores for conquest. It has not sought out the weak and marked them for absorption. Its example and fast growing influence have been a blessing to the na-

tions and made America the hope of the world. The Great Republic, whose flag as a delivering and elevating power has now gone round the earth, cherishes no malice, but its citizens do not forget the England of the Revolution.







